

Monday, September 19, 2011

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The Honourable Deb Matthews,  
Minister of Health and Long Term Care  
Hepburn Block  
10<sup>th</sup> floor, 80 Grosvenor St  
Toronto, ON, M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Matthews,

On behalf of the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit, I am writing to request that the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program be expanded to cover the families of children currently enrolled in the program.

Oral health is a key component of overall health, as poor oral health has been associated with major health concerns, such as diabetes, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. People with good oral health are able to eat better, have fewer days of missed work and lost income and may have greater self-confidence, all of which contributes to better overall health.

The Canadian Health Measures Survey, 2007-2009, reported that compared to higher income Canadian families, those from lower income families have almost two times worse oral health outcomes. The survey also found that almost 47% of lower income Canadians with natural teeth require one or more types of treatment. However, lower income families and those with no insurance report that they are 3 to 4 times more likely not to obtain dental care than higher income Canadians.

Overall, of low-income people living in Ottawa, there are an estimated 53% of adults (aged 18 to 64 years) and 82% of seniors (aged 65 years or older) that do not have dental health insurance to cover all or part of their dental expenses. For the majority of low-income patients, dental problems often progress until the patient presents with a more serious condition that requires intensive work at higher cost.

In 2010, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alpha) requested the Government of Ontario provide a dental program for low-income families, with a renewed focus on Ontario's low-income adults.

Expanding the current HSO program in Ottawa to cover the families of children currently enrolled could reach approximately 8,900 low-income adults at an estimated cost of \$3M annually. Given regular dental visits are cost effective, every \$1 invested in this preventive measure yields approximately \$38 of savings in unnecessary dental treatment for families and the health care system.

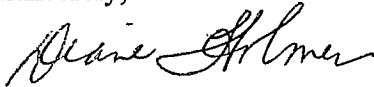
Helping parents can help the entire family, since parents are major influencers of healthy habits for other family members.



We look forward to our ongoing collaboration toward our common goal of improving oral health and overall health for low income families.

I thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,



Diane Holmes

Chair, Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit

c.c.

Hon. Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion & Sport  
Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. Robin Williams, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Linda Stewart, Executive Director, alpha  
City of Ottawa Mayor, Jim Watson  
Hon. Dalton McGuinty, MPP, Ottawa South  
Hon. Bob Chiarelli, MPP, Ottawa West Nepean  
Hon. Yasir Naqvi, MPP, Ottawa Centre  
Hon. Lisa MacLeod, MPP, Nepean-Carleton  
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, MPP, Ottawa-Vanier  
Hon. Phil McNeely, MPP, Ottawa-Orleans

